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V CORPS MEMBERS JOIN WITH DIYALA LEADERS FOR 'PEACE DAY' GATHERING

By Sgt. Kimberly Snow

196th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BA'QUBAH, Iraq — V Corps and local government leaders, sheiks, clerics, former Baathists and Diyala Province residents gathered here January 18 to attend Peace Day, an event aimed at quelling violence in the province and encouraging participation in the upcoming elections.

The event, hosted by Diyala Governor Dr. Abdullah Hassan Rashid al-Jburi, drew a crowd of about 150. On hand were 32nd Iraqi Army Brigade Commander Brig. Gen. Ha'ad Ibrahim Ali Mohammad Al Timimi; Diyala Police Chief Col. Adel Muhlan Ghidan; Provincial Joint Coordination Center President Brig. Gen. Tahseen Tawfiq Jassen Al Haialy, and Diyala Province Military Advisory Committee President Mohammad Hamad Al Obaydi. The group offered to answer questions from attendees.

In hopes of separating them from hardened terrorists, local insurgents were encouraged to attend, and were offered an opportunity to apply for amnesty for all crimes except murder. About 50 took advantage of the opportunity and signed pledges of non-violence.

During the meeting Al Haialy read a fatwa -- a religious order -- signed by the Religious Leaders of Diyala, a group of Sunni religious leaders. The order reversed the group's position on upcoming elections, okaying Sunni participation in upcoming Diyala balloting.

Col. Dana J.H. Pittard, commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division, addressed the gathering.

"Sign the forms, talk to Iraqi security forces, and then be peaceful. That is all that is being asked of you," Pittard said. "We are temporary guests in your great country, and we will leave when all is secure or when we are asked."

The event ended when Pittard extended a peace offering in the form of a handshake to a local sheik with whom coalition forces have had strained relations. The sheik accepted and pledged to work toward peace in Diyala.

